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SZASZ, THOMAS (1996)
The Meaning of Mind: Language, Morality and Neuroscience
Westport, Connecticut: Praeger

Given the alarming rate of increase in stress claims (reported by Comcare and others) and given Australians' propensity to engage in litigation following the RSI era, there are good reasons for managers to be kept informed of developments in the fields of clinical psychology and psychiatry. However, these fields are dominated by diverse and contradictory views about the logical status of the mind and of mind (mental) illness. A new book by Thomas Szasz is therefore timely and important for the discipline of management.

In 1961 Thomas Szasz published *The Myth of Mental Illness*, which contained a disarmingly simple thesis. Since illness can affect only the body, and since the mind is not a bodily organ, there can be no mental illness. So mental illness is a metaphor: minds can be 'sick' only in the sense that economies can be 'sick'. It follows that 'mental illness' is not something a person has, but is something (s)he does or says. Szasz used hysteria as an example of how a metaphor was literalised, how lying became illness. The same transformation occurred, he argues, with schizophrenia, the sacred symbol of psychiatry, and the title of his 1976 book.

In his 24th book, Szasz's target is those neuroscientists — or neuromythologists — who believe that the mind is the brain. Szasz argues that only as a verb does the word 'mind' name something — attending or heeding. Modern neuroscience, he argues, is a misdirected effort to explain 'mind' in terms of brain functions, and psychiatry is a misdirected effort to explain mental illness as brain disease. A consequence of these efforts is the undermining of the notions of moral agency and personal responsibility. The view that the mind is the brain is not an empirical finding — indeed how could it be? — but a rhetorical ruse concealing humanity's struggle to control individuals by controlling their language.

The central thesis — influenced by George Herbert Mead — is that the 'mind' is mediated through language which enables us to engage in self-conversation. The 'mind' is identified with the dialogue within. Chapter 1 analyses the relationship between 'mind' and language and the phenomenon of 'hearing voices'. For Szasz abnormal rumination (say auditory hallucinations) is self-conversation. 'So-called hallucinations, hypochondriacal preoccupations, obsessional thoughts, and so forth are all instances of self-conversations' (p 15). Critics will object that such self-conversations are beyond the control of the individual. Not so, says Szasz, who believes it is an error to frame these phenomena in terms of the individual's alleged inability to control his thoughts. Thinking, talking to others and talking to oneself are voluntary acts. Self-conversation is normal and hearing voices a universal phenomenon.

This argument enables Szasz, in Chapter 2, to view responsibility as the paradigmatic self-conversation, since conscience is a particular kind of self-conversation where the self's inner dialogue concerns the goodness or badness of its own conduct. Szasz suggests, therefore, that we treat the concepts of right and wrong, responsibility and mind as a single entity. Conversely, the view that mind and brain are one, coupled with deterministic assumptions about brain and behaviour, are rhetorical flourishes and not scientific hypotheses, let alone facts. Their purpose is to enable individuals to evade their responsibilities for their actions. 'The discourse of minding implies responsibility. In contrast, the discourse of brain-mind protects us from the dilemmas that the duty of holding ourselves and others responsible entails.' (p 46) One cannot hold a brain responsible for murder.

Chapter 3 attacks the popular view that memory is a noun which names an entity located in the brain. Szasz argues that whilst memory depends on the brain, it is not in it. Memory is a matter of producing rather than reproducing. It is a communication and not the transfer of an engram from neurochemical processes into 'factual information'. Viewing memory as a function of the brain, many neuroscientists accept the existence of an entity called 'false memory' and thus a newly invented mental illness — False Memory Syndrome. However, Szasz argues, the crucial element here is not false memory but false accusation. 'Why do young women search for their 'lost' memories (of sexual abuse)? To make themselves feel better (which was Freud's aim)? Or to make others (men) feel worse (which is the aim of the radical feminists)? In either case, the finder of the lost memory must take responsibility — and must be held responsible — for what she does with what she finds' (p 63).

In Chapter 4 Szasz attacks materialists and mind-brain identity theorists (Dennett, the Churchlands, Searle, Popper and Eccles, Crick, Jaynes) and mathematicians of the mind (Hofstadter, Penrose, Tipler, Davies and Gell-Mann). In arguing his case against biological reductionism he points to the covert political — economic agenda of neuroscience in terms reminiscent of Feyerabend. The present state of neuroscience reflects the results of a long-standing alliance between science and state. The ostensible agenda of neuroscience is the quest for scientific understanding of the brain but its real agenda is to elevate to the level of scientific fact the doctrine that (mis)behaviour is biologically determined and that holding individuals responsible for their (mis)behaviour is unscientific. Moral agency is thereby explained as chemical sufficiency; misbehaviour as chemical deficiency. Neuroscience or Lyshenkoism?

Chapter 5 provides a brief history of the idea of mind from Homer's naturalism, via Cartesian dualism to GH Mead's pragmatism in which the distinguishing trait of selfhood resides in the capacity of the minded being to be an object to itself.

Inexorably Szasz's final chapter returns the reader to 'modernity's master metaphors: mental illness and mental treatment'. This is familiar material to those who have followed Szasz on his long crusade. His emphasis here is on 'crazy talk' and the mistaken belief that it is a symptom of schizophrenia. No sooner was cellular pathology established (by Virchow) as the objective criterion of illness than it was expanded by the claim that the 'senseless' speech of patients — a subjective criterion — was indicative of cellular pathology in the speaker's brain. Bleuler's invention of schizophrenia in 1911 completed the psychiatric transformation of language to lesion. After considering the cultural context of acceptable 'crazy talk' (James Joyce's novels, speaking in tongues) Szasz argues that schizophrenic discourse appears to be incomprehensible because it is vocalised self-conversation, ie speech intended to be understood by the speaker, not the listener. On this view the analogy with masturbation (sexual self-stimulation) and schizophrenese (semantic self-stimulation) is well taken. Szasz argues that the leap from aberrant discourse to aberrant brain function is fallacious. Asking why a schizophrenic speaker produces aberrant discourse is futile since people have reasons for what they do, not theories of 'producing' what others deem aberrant. Szasz's treatment of crazy hearing following naturally. People do not 'hear voices', they hear speech (often their own). Szasz claims that neuroimaging studies of schizophrenics support his thesis that 'disorders of inner speech' are manifestations of disavowed self-conversation projected onto imaginary voices since the region of the brain associated with speaking (Broca's area) is activated and not those areas associated with hearing (Wernicke's area). The schizophrenic who 'hallucinates' or has 'delusions' is profoundly dishonest with himself since he denies that the voices he hears are his own thoughts and that his delusions are metaphors he interprets literally. 'I believe viewing the schizophrenic as a liar would advance our understanding of schizophrenia' (p 130).

In an epilogue Szasz applauds the French existentialists (Sartre, Camus) for seeing the person as a moral agent and for fighting to restore agency, liberty and responsibility to the human being as person. But he might also have quoted Sartre's comment that existentialist philosophy is too tough-mindedly optimistic for most people because there is no escaping one's freedom and responsibilities. To realise the existential project we have to stop trying to unravel the riddle of a mythical entity called the 'mind'. Rather our task should be to understand and judge persons as moral agents responsible for their actions and not victims of brain chemistry.

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